Brief Early History of Los Angeles Public Transportation

Privately operated public transportation got its start in 1873 when the City of Los Angeles granted operational franchises for horse drawn streetcar railways (1870s), which later became cable car railways (1880s), then electric railways (1890s), two electric trolley bus lines (1942), and diesel motorbus lines (1923). There was even an early subway tunnel between Sunset/Glendale and 4th/Hill St. that operated from 1925-1955. Over the years about 200 privately owned and operated transit companies have come and gone. The Great Merger of 1911 knit together many of these early transit companies into two main systems, the Pacific Electric Railway of interurban "red car" lines serving Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange and San Bernardino Counties; and the Los Angeles Railway system of "yellow car" streetcars that connected nearby neighborhoods with the central business district downtown.

They were governed from Sacramento by the Railroad Commission, which later became the Public Utilities Commission. Up until the formation of the first local public transit agency, there was little local control or local coordination of the patchwork system, which had been largely converted over to a bus-based transit system during the highway building boom post WWII.

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, believing that an integrated public transportation system was essential to the economic health of the metropolitan area, worked with the California state legislature to form the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA) in 1951. It was empowered to formulate plans and policy for a publicly owned/operated mass rapid transit system that would replace the crumbling infrastructure of privately owned and operated systems. The enabling legislation mandated that the Governor appoint the LAMTA's seven member Board of Directors in consultation with local officials.

In 1957, the legislature gave the LAMTA the authority to purchase and operate existing privately owned bus lines with capital provided by the sale of revenue bonds. Effective March 3, 1958, they acquired the Los Angeles Transit Lines (successor to Los Angeles Railway and Los Angeles Motor Bus companies) Metropolitan Coach Lines (successor to Pacific Electric Railway and other independent bus companies) and Asbury Rapid Transit System to create the first publicly governed transit operations system in Los Angeles.

See Also

LACMTA in Brief
Predecessor Agencies

Transit Agencies Timeline
Transit Family Tree

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